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BURNED INTO  
MY MEMORY  
WHITEHAIR



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# PICTURES BURNED INTO MY MEMORY

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PICTURES BURNED  
INTO MY MEMORY



## PICTURES BURNED INTO MY MEMORY

EVERY man who has been on the battle lines of the great war has seen things which are burned into his memory. Neither time nor distance will permit them to grow dim. Some of them are sad and terrible pictures, others inspiring and uplifting. But none of them would he banish if he could. They have shown him the greatness and undreamed-of fineness which just common, every-day men are capable of acquiring. Those who have gone into the great training camps and re-

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serve trenches can little dream of the great heights to which men rise in the stress and strain of battle. Even during the monotony of the ordinary days at the front, one cannot come to truly understand the spirit of the men. It is only when the news spreads up and down the line that the great push is pending, that the men begin to lose their commonplaceness, and take on that indescribable spirit that makes one think only of unconquered kings. There are no better words to describe them than those of John Masefield when he wrote of the troops at Gallipoli:

“They went like kings in a pageant to the imminent death.”

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We have watched them pour into the great training camps of England and Scotland, laughing and singing, always hiding the pangs of homesickness under a cloak of cheerfulness. Then we have gone with them into the great base camps where it is drill, drill, drill, and the great battle line seems to fade in the distance. We have followed them into the far flung desert camps of the Libyan Desert and the Palestine Frontier. But in spite of terrible heat and sand storms and burning thirst, they are still sticking it out, never dreaming that the heroic hovers about them all. But these memories grow dim when we see them in the dead hours of night

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shoulder to shoulder march forth from their base camp out into the night toward the sound of the faint but ever-increasing roar of the great guns, which foretell of the front. It is here we get the first real glimpse into their hearts. No man can follow them up to the front and really come to know them, and come back a pessimist about human nature.

In September, 1917, I was at the front near Ypres. It was the day before the great push and the roads to the front were choked with the tens of thousands of men "going in." They were not talking, or singing, or whistling. I heard no band except one that was playing an

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old hymn of the Church. All around were the silent and determined men. About them was the turmoil of that incredible traffic which precedes the big push, the rumble and roar of motor lorries, of endless streams of wagons, the thunder of the great guns, and the terrific sound of the bursting shells. But the human silence was almost unbroken, in that long line of marching men. By the thousands they passed,—men with faces rigid and white, conscious of what was before them. I was constantly reminded of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. They did not want to die; life was sweet. Youth dreams of tomorrow. In their hearts

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they were saying: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

And yet if they had been given their choice, I do not believe a single boy would have turned his back on that inferno. Home letters had been written. So far as they could, they had put their houses in order. They knew they might not come back, yet they went up like kings.

Across the pictures burned into my memory there is written literally in letters of blood the word *sacrifice*. *Sacrifice* more pure and holy than our modern life has ever dreamed of. A sacrifice which knows no personal return, and is not made alone through love of coun-

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try, but through devotion to the most sacred and righteous things of life. Heroism is no longer the exceptional thing among men. It is the every-day life of all. However, it is not a question of how much; but have I done my utmost.

The lad who goes over the top and falls back into the trench, no more to answer the bugle call, is as much a hero and has as truly done his part as the boy who leads the gallant charge across No Man's Land and wins the Victoria Cross. Yet I would rather pity the man who went among them and tried to tell them they were heroes. A few times, I have heard some speakers refer to

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them in such a way, and as I glanced around I have seen the smile and the sly wink.

The entire life might be summed up as a life of *sacrificial giving*. The spirit of the men who have made the greatest sacrifice is truly wonderful. I recall one young friend, a Canadian captain, a graduate of Queen's University, who went out to France among the first Canadian troops. Before many days, he found himself at the front. He was stationed with his company on Kemmel Hill. One night as he stood on duty, looking over the parapet into No Man's Land, a star shell burst overhead, and he said, "There was burned into my

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memory the great Ypres salient, the German lines in front—the dreadful picture of No Man's Land covered with barb wire fences, with wreckage not only of material things but human sacrifice as well. Then darkness! Days afterward back in the hospital the news was broken to me that I would never see again. My eyes were gone; a German sniper had gotten me."

After months of painful work, he was taught to live a new life. One can only imagine his thoughts during those long days in the hospital and school where he was learning to live a new and different life. He must have thought a good many times of the life ahead. How

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soon the public forgets! How many of us have seen in our community some old soldier crippled and blind, selling shoe laces on the street corner, earning barely enough to live on. We have forgotten that *he* made *his* sacrifice for *us* during the days of '61.

My young Canadian friend returned to Toronto and found a position as a stenographer in a big business concern—not because they wished to do him a favor, but because of his ability as a stenographer, which he had attained after many hard months of persistent effort and work.

Although out of the war, he is to-day teaching to all those with whom he

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comes in touch that it is truly more blessed to give than to receive. Never have I met a more cheerful man. He will not permit you to sympathize with him. As I heard him remark to a friend who was speaking about his glass eyes looking so natural, "You know I have one big advantage over you. I can change my eyes to match the color of my necktie!" Not only has he made his sacrifice, but he has made it with a willing and humble heart.

I have watched the wounded streaming back down the path of the walking wounded. It was then I again came to realize that sacrifice brings forth that which is finest and best. In spite of

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wounded and broken bodies, their souls seem somehow or other to soar above the material things and take on that which we speak of as immortality. For not only were they coming back with uncomplaining lips, but all of them were trying to be cheerful and helpful to one another in spite of torturous pain. I saw one man coming back whose trousers had been torn away. He was caked with mud and blood and his features were almost unrecognizable. He did not walk; he staggered from side to side. Sometimes he almost fell, but on his back he carried his comrade, his pal, who could not walk himself. I looked at them and the tears

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came to my eyes—as they would come to the eyes of any man who watches the walking wounded. But these two—no tears from *them*. They looked at me and tried to smile.

Over and over again I have seen a British soldier, badly wounded himself, take the cup of tea, the cigarette given him by the Y. M. C. A. secretary outside the dressing station, and give it to a wounded German. When the war is over and the German prisoners go home and tell the truth about their treatment at the hands of the British, that story must open the eyes of their nation, for it is a wonderful story of compassion and kindness.

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We talk of Christianity. But there at the front, with all the horrors of war, we come again and again upon the real thing in Christianity.

We also talk of democracy. There is no democracy on earth like that of the trenches. It is true fellowship there. Social barriers do not exist among the men who live that life. When a company goes over the top, the young officer is the first man out of the trench. It is the officer who is always working for the comfort of his men, looking after their health, trying to get them a better billet. When the wounded come back, the officers take their turn with the rest.

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One of our secretaries saw a wounded British colonel sitting out in front of a dressing station. He asked why he didn't go in and have his wounds attended to.

"Oh," he said, "it isn't my turn yet."

Some time later the secretary came along again. Still the colonel sat outside waiting. The secretary knew that not only all the men who had been there before had been attended to, but also that other men had arrived and been treated. When he spoke to the officer, however, he got the same reply: "Oh, it isn't my turn yet!"

That is the spirit of the British army, and it is the same of the French. Their

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officers are like big brothers or fathers to the men. It is the same with our own army. And when this war is over there is going to be more loyalty, more brotherly kindness brought back into everyday life than the world has ever known. No longer will the talk of the brotherhood of man be merely talk. It will become a great reality of life.

As for the courage of these men, it is sometimes so great that it almost appears foolish.

After the Gallipoli campaign the Anzac troops were very largely moved to Egypt. Everyone will recall the superb and terrible campaign of the Dardanelles. One would think that the men

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who had lived through that hell would have been glad of the comparatively peaceful time they were having in Egypt. But not they! They soon were fed up with it and wanted to get back where they could see active duty.

There was one youth, an Australian. He was a country lad, used to freedom, unused to discipline. He stowed away on a troop ship, hoping to get over to France to fight, but he was discovered after the ship sailed, and he was returned to Egypt. Technically he was a deserter. His motive, of course, did not excuse his act. He was court-martialed and sentenced. While he was under guard in the desert camp the Turks at-

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tacked. Every man was needed to repel them. He was left without a guard. He had no arms, of course. He had no right to leave the place where he was. But he did. He broke his arrest and went out and began bringing in the wounded under shell fire. As he was carrying in the fifteenth man, he was killed by a stray bullet. The colonel told the story and said he had been recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal. When asked how about the court-martial, the colonel naively replied: "We have lost the papers."

Here at home we pity those men for those wounds, but to them their wounds are their badges of honor. There are

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two things they always want to show you: the home pictures, and their scars. Again they are like the Christ, because in their bodies they carry the marks of love and sacrifice for humanity.

They probably would laugh at you if you put it that way—though I am not sure they would. They have truly offered their lives in order that those back home may have the more abundant life. There are no words to describe the spirit of these men. After you have been with them, you form a whole new set of ideas about human nature. God knows you try to make over your own self to bring it nearer to what they are. One of the greatest privileges

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that ever could come to any man or woman, no matter how mighty or how great, is the privilege of serving these men who are offering their bodies as a *living sacrifice* for our own Country, Home and God.

One should not forget the stretcher bearers. In that little world of brave men over there, the bravest of all I sometimes think are the stretcher bearers. No man can live a life of daily compassion—a compassion that goes to the ultimate limit of sacrificing life itself—and come back from it unchanged. In this connection one marvels at the untiring devotion and service and courage of the surgeons and nurses. They

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seem to have caught the spirit of the men. They live their lives in the constant presence of human suffering.

One cannot understand how any man or woman can come into touch with the reality of the front and not have every fibre of his or her soul changed.

There are two things you will always find in the pockets of the boys at the front: photographs of the home folks and their letters. The pictures, often with a small Testament, are always in their breast pockets over the heart. I think they sometimes are put there as a kind of charm to ward off bullets. Any-way, that's where they always are. And the look in a man's face when he shows

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you the picture of his mother, his wife, his children, and you say—as you always do—that they are beautiful, will bring tears to your own eyes.

Those packages of letters! They carry them around for months, and read them over and over, until the creases are so worn the sheets will hardly hold together.

In the army camps it makes no difference whether a boy comes from a great millionaire home or the most humble of homes. All are on the same level. But it makes a tremendous lot of difference whether his life is being enriched by a constant stream of letters from home, or whether the folks at home are

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considering themselves too busy to write him more than an occasional letter. You can send your boy no greater treasure than an abundant number of home letters chock-full of cheerfulness and home news. In spite of the distance, the home ties are becoming stronger.

It is indeed curious how the men who truly go into battle like kings in the pageant, who fight, when they must, like savages, become again, underneath it all, like the boys they were when they were little chaps, to whom their mother was the most wonderful being in all the world. The old, simple, human feeling comes to the surface again. Men have

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learned that in the last analysis these are the only things that really count. Men out there are truly thinking of Eternity as a reality.

Loneliness, pain, death are ever present. They dwarf all other things by comparison, and loneliness is not the least of them. After watching them under shell fire, noticing how unconcerned and calmly they carry on, I have come to feel that to a certain extent they become reconciled to the shells and the mud, and the vermin, and the rats. But they never grow used to the longing for human love and companionship. From the trenches of France they are going to bring back a new appreciation

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of home. *For what have they not suffered?*

Practically all the soldiers become fatalists about death. You see men die through some incredible chance. You see them escape by a miracle. Gradually you come to believe, as Tommy puts it, "When a shell comes over with your name on it, you will get yours." In the meantime, "Why worry? You never know your luck." That's the way they put it.

One of the strangest experiences I have ever had was going into a musical show the boys were putting on in a Y. M. C. A. hut just a few miles from Fritz's line. The place was packed,

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every seat being taken. Every inch of standing room was crowded, and the rafters were hidden by rows of dangling feet. The faces were a study. I never saw such eagerness, such absorption, and such enjoyment. And all the time overhead I heard the whining shells and roar of guns outside. But the boys took no more notice of it than a New York audience would of a faint murmur from the streets outside a theater.

If it were not for the abundant amount of good humor, they all seem to have one feeling that surely all of them would break down with the strain. Of course they reserve the right to grum-

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ble. "Grousing" is what Tommy calls it. He grumbles and groused to his heart's content when there is nothing serious the matter; but when he comes face to face with the great reality, such as suffering and dying, he meets it with a smile. There is more brave smiling in those pitiful lines of the walking wounded on their way to a dressing station than in any Easter "church parade" that ever strolled up Fifth Avenue. If every man and woman in the United States could see those smiles, there would be no more complaining about the heatless, meatless and wheatless days back here. There, smiles are rather difficult, rather grotesque, for

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the faces are stiff with mud, and blood, and are drawn with pain. But there they are! The suffering lips are dumb —no murmuring or complaining, but instead they are trying to smile.

It is not to be wondered at that the people at home don't understand the boys out there. They hear about their swearing and the murderous fighting, and they think that their sons have been brutalized by war. In a way they have been. You can't live in that hell and keep up the surface refinements of drawing-rooms and "bank parlors." What have men got to do with "polish" over there? I have told how they come in from battle with their clothes ripped

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and torn until they are almost naked. It is the same way with the spirit, which is the actual man. All the frills and the veneer are stripped from him and you get down to the bare soul. The language he uses, many of the things he does, are merely the rags and tatters of the old covering of that spirit. They are not pretty, but neither do they hide his true self as his old ways did. And the splendid thing about it all is this: through those ugly tatters you see him so much finer and truer and more heroic than you ever dreamed he was.

I was in a French hospital once which was an institution for the training of the permanent wounded; a place where

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men who had lost an arm, or a leg, or both were to be taught occupations which would make them self-supporting. This was the opening day. A man was singing with a voice of such beauty that I asked who he was, and found that he had been in the Grand Opera in Paris. After a while he began singing the "Marseillaise." I heard a noise behind me, and I turned to see every man there getting to his feet or to his crutches, if he had only one leg. One by one they pulled themselves up to attention, holding themselves there, tears streaming down their cheeks until the song was over.

Sometimes when I have seen an audi-

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ence in this country rise more or less casually for the playing of the "Star Spangled Banner," with some of them putting on their wraps in order to get ready to leave the minute the meeting was over, I have thought of that other audience in France and I have wished that I could place them side by side for the American people to see, that they might realize that only through supreme sacrifice can come supreme love of country.

In the light of the colossal sacrifices over seas, what can I do back here? Rightly can such a question be asked. There is no going to sleep back here with the sound of the roaring guns in

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our ears, as there is in the thousands of homes out in France and Flanders. Out there—is not the fact of the awful price of war ever present? Hospitals are everywhere. Wounded come back in trains and ambulances, and there is the never-ceasing sound of marching troops. But in spite of distance, the war is coming home to us back here.

Some time ago I was sitting on a railroad train, in one of the far western states. Toward the middle of the day we slowed down to a little country station for water. As I knew we would stop for five or ten minutes, I jumped off the train as we pulled into the station, expecting to get some exercise on

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the station platform. Scarcely had I stepped onto the platform when I saw a sight that held me until the conductor called, "All aboard!"

It was a young lad who was going off to camp. The father and mother were telling him good-bye. Time sped on, and they stood looking into one another's face. The time for words had passed, for had not the mother arisen long before daylight that day in order to prepare for John the best breakfast her loving hands could serve? Had she not gone to his room long before daylight, there to stand by his side and dream over once again all the dreams of his future? Now all was changed by

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the hands of the war. Only the mother heart will ever know all that must have passed through her mind as she stood and then knelt by his side.

But when at last she called him, all traces of that battle which she had fought out at his bedside had been forced from her face. Instead, she urged him to eat this and the other thing, keeping cheerful while both he and the father tried to talk about this and that subject pertaining to the farm, all of them trying to hide from the others the fact that they were not eating. At last the time to go to the station had arrived. They drove off along the long country roads to the railroad

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station. With heavy hearts they waited for those last few moments.

As I stood there watching this scene, I truly felt I was on holy ground. As the bell began to ring, the old father took the boy's hand and, looking him in the eyes, he said, "Good-bye, John, and God bless you!"

But John could no longer restrain himself and he threw his arms around his father's neck. The old mother looked long and earnestly into her son's face, seeming to burn into her heart the last picture of her boy. I turned and got onto the train with the same feeling that I have had as I have watched the long line of men going into the trenches

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before the big push. Here was *real sacrifice*.

John came into the coach and as the seat next to me was vacant, he sat down. For a long time we rode in silence. He finally turned, and I think more to himself than to me, he said, "You know it is not that I don't *want* to go, but I feel I *must* go. But you see it is mighty hard to leave mother and dad. Dad and I talked it over. He did not want me to ask for exemption and I did not want to, either. We all felt that somebody had to go, and did not see any big enough reason for me not to go."

He had truly heard his country's call. No longer was the war more than three

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thousand miles away over land and sea, but it had come into the heart of that little country home.

It is time that we squarely face the issue that is here. It is no more the war of the boy at the front than it is the war of every man, woman and child back here who boasts of being an American.

Patriotism is not measured to-day in words, but in *action*. Any man who goes about talking of how he would love to go out to France to fight the Hun and proceeds to do just as little as he can to help his country back here, is deceiving no one but himself. If he means what he says, his action will tell the story. Not only will he give and give

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again to Y. M. C. A., Red Cross and other war agencies, but he will look upon the purchase of a Liberty Bond as a sacred duty. Talk of security and interest will cease. In reality, the man who hoards his money and refuses to loan it to the Government because he can get a higher rate of interest somewhere else, is not only a slacker, but he is a *traitor*.

Many of us can learn much from the old Syrian shoemaker in one of the southern cities. He came into the office of the War Savings Chairman and laid on the desk an old dirty paper sack containing all the money he possessed.

“I want a thousand-dollar War Sav-

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ings Bond for my wife and each of my five children," he said. "This is all the money I have in the world, but I am glad to loan it to my country. Besides, they will pay good interest."

Then he revealed his true spirit when he added: "It is all I have, but if my country wants my money and they never pay me back a cent of interest or never return my money, it is all right; it's my country."

He had heard his country's call. His was a true American heart.

"By their works ye shall know them." There is no neutral ground to-day. *We are for America or we are against her.* The only way that we can show our loy-

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alty is by constructive action. Our patriotism is not measured by quantity, but rather by quality. One admires the millionaire who leaves his office and goes to Washington to work for his Government at a dollar a year. But he is not to be compared with the widow mother who sends her only son to war and then takes in washings so that she can buy Liberty Bonds and give to Y. M. C. A. and Red Cross.

It is not enough that ours is a united nation; there should be in the heart of every individual the feeling of personal responsibility. Every school child should be taught that when it gives up candy, chewing gum, movies and other

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pleasures in order that it may buy a twenty-five cent Thrift Stamp, it is as truly a patriot and is backing the boys over seas, as is the man who buys a million dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds.

At the same time we must come to realize that a traitor back here is just as bad as a traitor out there. Any man who is furnishing inferior supplies and ammunition to the Government in order to graft is truly betraying his country. Any labor leader who, for mere profits to himself and his organization, calls a strike and holds up shipbuilding or other war preparations, is just as much betraying his country as is the boy in the front line who throws down

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his gun and refuses to go over the top.

Preachers and professors who are teaching pro-German propaganda or pacifism in church or class-room are indeed enemies of the Country. The time has now come in our great national crisis when any man, be he the head of a great industry, a labor leader, a preacher—no matter who—if he is a traitor to his country, is entitled to what a traitor gets over there: *a stone wall, in front of a firing squad.*

In order to win the war—and we must and have to win this war—many will have to lay down their lives. Many mothers will have to give their sons;

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women will have to give up husbands and fathers, but all, regardless of race, color or parentage, must come forward and lay on the altar of their Country their *all*. Out of the conflict will come a bigger and better America than we have ever dreamed of before. A greater nation of character and honor will have been purchased through sacrifice and death.

But with it all, none of us back here can compare our sacrifice, our self-denial, the things we are giving up—a lump of sugar in the morning cup of coffee, an hour from bridge, money, with the sacrifice over there; for men are giving up themselves, their bodies

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—everything but their souls. Those they are not giving up—but finding. There is no man or woman in America to-day who is too high or too good to black the boots of those boys out there on the battle front teaching the world the meaning of *sacrifice and love*.

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